

February 24, 2016

Education Committee
House Bill No. 5306
Senate Bill No. 176
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Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Helene Figueroa and I am the director of the child care program for CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a union representing approximately 4,300 child care providers across our state.

Section 6 of House Bill No. 5306 proposes dropping a well-staffed five-region approach to a system of rigorous support for early childhood programs seeking national accreditation. The dismantling of the Accreditation Facilitation Project as we know it will undermine the longstanding emphasis that Connecticut has always placed on high quality early care and education. Because NAEYC and Head Start accreditation are regarded as the gold standard in this field, Connecticut set the goal long ago that all centers should seek to achieve this level of excellence. In fact, achieving this designation is required by all programs receiving state funding and for other programs it rewards them with a 5% differential in the rates paid by the child care subsidy program. Even parents have been educated to look for NAEYC or Head Start accreditation when they look for child care.

The five-region approach provides equitable access for all cities and towns, making staff much more available as they are locally based. Is the State moving away from the goal to reach accreditation for all centers by watering down the language? The Accreditation Facilitation Project has received national acclaim because it works. It is our understanding that the United Way would now be taking up the task of providing accreditation support via a \$3.5 million quality improvement contract, yet no one has been told how that will look once it moves over the United Way.

It is not unreasonable to think AFP could be modified; however, we should retain the expertise and structure and blend new requirements and supports (like family child care supports and the CCDF professional development requirements) into the AFP rather than throw the whole thing out and start again.

We are very concerned that this move will undermine instead of bolster quality in child care settings, especially as it relates to accreditation. After all, national standards are important. It is the State's job to ensure that there is a clear pathway to achieving them.

Looking at this proposed language through another lens, we find it to be incomplete. Several years ago, when the Accreditation Facilitation Project was housed at DSS, the program included support for accreditation of family child care providers through the National Association for Family Child Care, NAFCC. As with child care centers, achieving accreditation rewards the provider with a 5% increase in the subsidy rate from Care 4 Kids. CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 represents the 4300 family child care providers who receive Care 4 Kids. Our members want to

have access to support in becoming accredited and request that NAFCC and family child care be added to the language in the bill.

Regarding Senate Bill No. 176, we are in austere times and the State should be focusing its energy and dollars on the lowest income families when considering the establishment of any NEW programs. Smart Start was enacted to provide high quality child care in areas of the state where it does not exist for poor children. Changing the needs test for school districts from 60% low-income children to 40% low-income children in order to access Smart Start dollars goes against the spirit in which this program was initiated. We do not support this change as it further exacerbates the differing guidelines that have been established for the vast array of early care and education programs rather than trying to streamline them. The lack of consistency in eligibility, rates, and parent co-pays among programs is a nightmare for those centers that utilize multiple funding streams and makes it difficult for parents to make any sense of the system they must navigate as well.

Furthermore, any expansion of slots at this time sends a clear message to teachers that their inability to earn a living wage is once again being overlooked. The level of turnover in this field affects quality. Children need to establish strong and stable relationships with caregivers. as a measure of quality. Every dollar we spend on something other than compensation for this grossly underpaid workforce is one more reason for good early care and education teachers to walk away. That's not good for children! We should NOT be increasing the number of preschool slots when we currently do not have enough funding to pay ECE teachers what they need to survive.

I would also like to **support House Bill No. 5305**, which states that school districts have a duty to provide trainings that give information on the duties and responsibilities that paraeducators are expected to perform, are consistent with the needs of the students to whom they are assigned and given before their assignment begins (usually at the start of the year). This should be common sense but many school districts fail to provide even this basic level of training. House Bill No. 5305 would help correct this training shortfall.

Helene Figueroa
CSEA SEIU Local 2001
760 Capitol Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106